

"Unfortunately, Cuts Might be Necessary to Balance Budget"

by Howard Crouse, Superintendent

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This is the time of year when districts plan their budgets for the next school year. Indian Prairie is committed to a balanced budget next year. The budget discussion process begins with a review of current and projected revenues.

We will receive \$10.9 million more in local property taxes than last year. However, with what is a "worst case" scenario, state aid to the district may decrease by as much as \$6 million, giving us total revenue of approximately \$212.9 million. The loss in state aid reflects the state's formula that decreases state funding as local property taxes per student rise.

We anticipate adding 1,000 new students next year, with larger classes moving into both the middle and high school levels. We have contracts in place for our teachers and classified staff. We know that our costs for custodial services, transportation, and utilities will go up. We also know that we have \$1.5 million of capital projects that must be done to maintain our buildings in a safe condition. These projects would have been done with bonds had the referendum passed, but now will be part of the operating budget. Other projects have been put on hold.

As we put the pieces together, we have found that we need to make options available to ensure a balanced budget. In the first action taken, the Board of Education issued Reduction in Force notices to a large number of teachers in several categories. These included all first-year elementary classroom and special education teachers, all non-tenured elementary and middle school physical education teachers, middle school guidance counselors, and high school LMC directors. These RIF notices, as they are known, had to be issued no less than 45 days before the end of the school term, as required by law. The broad categories included in the RIF notices simply provided the board with options to consider while it wrestles with the budget. As the budget develops, we hope to be able to return many of these teachers to the classroom next year.

All other expenditures are also under review. We will eliminate five administrators, cut discretionary spending by at least \$1.3 million, and reduce support staff. Some extra-curricular stipends will also be cut.

The Board is also increasing student fees next year. When compared to other area districts, Indian Prairie's registration and related fees are lower than most other districts. Many school districts have shifted toward increased user fees to generate additional revenues. The fees increasing include our general registration, high school parking, driver's education, extracurricular participation, and technology. Many districts have funded technology improvements through technology fees as opposed to bonds.

We have discussed both increasing class sizes and having elementary physical education taught by someone other than gym teachers. Both measures result in elimination of teaching positions. Increasing class size averages not only results in fewer existing positions at the elementary and middle school levels, but also reduces the number of new teaching positions needed at the high school level. We are considering returning to class size limits at the elementary level of 27 students in kindergarten and first grade and 30 in grades 2-5. Middle school core classes could average as high as 33, high school classes as high as 35.

It is important to stress that all items, except student fees, are options to be considered, not foregone conclusions. This worst case scenario will hopefully get better as the legislature and the governor finalize the state's budget and state aid to Indian Prairie is calculated.

When will our budget picture become clearer? About two weeks after the state's budget is done. Our eyes are on Springfield.